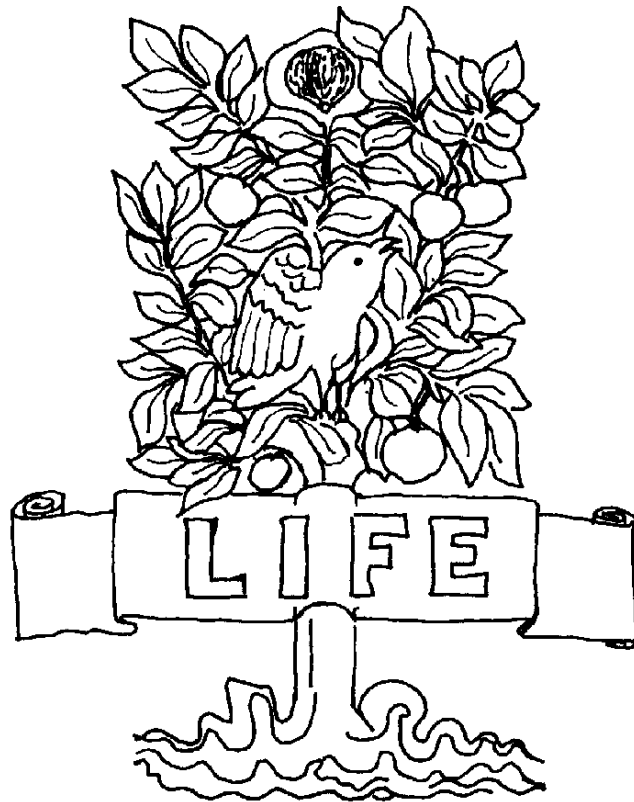


# The Funeral Customary



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**M**ost of us would rather not think about death ahead of time, with the result that many families hurriedly arrange funerals for loved ones, wondering if they've done "the right thing" for the deceased. We prepare carefully for our marriages, for the birth of children, for baptism, yet we push away all thoughts of our funeral, that important liturgy marking our passage into eternal life, the ultimate victory over death won for us in our Lord's death and resurrection. This customary addresses some ways you can plan your own funeral. It also explains what services St John's offers to the family when death has occurred.

### PLANNING AHEAD

1. You should, in advance, complete a medical directive (called a Durable Power of Attorney, Medical Power of Attorney, or a Power of Attorney for Medical Issues by different people) – it gives instructions to family, friends, and health care providers when you are no longer able to speak for yourself.
2. You should have a will.
3. Funeral Arrangements Checklist: This form (included here) is a practical guide to help your church, family, and friends take care of the arrangements – it deals with everything from your obituary, to the hymns you would like.

A copy of each of the above may be completed in consultation with your priest, family, attorney, and then kept on file in the parish office. It is important that family members or friends be aware that you have written out your wishes. It is also important that you update these forms from time to time as your wishes and circumstances change.

### AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Because it is important and comforting to be in a right relationship with God at the end of one's life, the dying person should, if possible, arrange to make a final Confession and receive Communion. For the same reason, Anointing of the Sick should be received at least once during a serious illness. The Church provides several rites for this purpose, all located in the Book of Common Prayer. If possible, these should be led by the parish priest, assisted by the deacon, with family and friends surrounding the dying person – depending on

circumstances, they may also (with the exception of private Confession and Absolution) be conducted by a deacon or layperson.

## AFTER DEATH

The priest should be called at once when death has occurred, no matter what time of day or night. The family and friends should take time to touch the body of the dead person in prayer, and to pray over the deceased before the funeral home is called. The survivors may ask the priest to accompany them to the funeral home. If arrangements have not been made in advance, the priest can be a clear head and emotional support in making difficult decisions. The priest will also help the family decide the form of the funeral service if arrangements have not been made in advance.

## DISPOSITION OF THE BODY

Both burial and cremation are an acceptable expression of the Christian theology of death. Donation of the body, or of any organs, is also an acceptable choice for Christians, provided that the body is handled reverently and that it is ultimately buried or cremated. Whatever choice we make, our bodies will be resurrected in newness with Christ.

Although many people choose to have the body embalmed and treated with cosmetics before burial, it is important to know that other choices exist. In Michigan, if burial takes place within 48 hours of death, the body does not have to be embalmed, though viewing (a visitation or vigil) would not be permitted in that case. Cosmetic treatment of the body is also not required.

St. John's has a fine Columbarium in our garden for the ashes of members; please speak to the Rector if you are interested in this.

## RECEPTION OF THE BODY

Many people choose to hold "calling hours" or a "visitation" to receive mourners – that is, to keep vigil – in the funeral home. However, another choice is available, and that is to keep vigil in the church. This is appropriate, for the Prayer Book states in the introduction to the burial services, "Baptized Christians are properly buried from the church." (BCP p. 468) If the survivors choose this option (or if the deceased has made this choice ahead of time) the body is brought to the church after it is prepared for burial (if the deceased is

to be cremated, the body may still be present in a simple coffin at the church, with cremation *after* the funeral). The celebrant meets the coffin at the door of the church and says two brief prayers. The closed coffin – the coffin may not be open in the church – is then covered with a pall, or, in the case of a veteran, a flag, and brought into the nave of the church. The pall, a large decorative cloth, covers the casket as a reminder that we are all equal in the eyes of God. A Bible or Gospel book may be placed on the altar end of the coffin, open to the Gospel lesson to be read at the funeral, and the Paschal candle, a reminder of the resurrection and eternal life, burns at the head of the casket. (The feet of the deceased are nearest the altar except in the case of a priest, whose head is toward the altar.) If the body has been cremated, the reception would be held at the door of the church, as above, and the container of ashes, covered by a veil, would be placed on a table where the coffin usually stands. The Bible or Gospel book and Paschal candle would be placed beside the table.

## THE VIGIL

Wherever the Vigil is held (at the funeral home or in the church) Christian prayer should be at its center. The priest will offer prayers with the family at the first viewing of the body, as well as at the closing of the casket. Since the vigil would likely take place the night before the funeral, Evening Prayer or Compline are appropriate forms of worship. If the church is used for the vigil, refreshments and a place for family and friends to greet visitors will be provided.

## THE FUNERAL SERVICE

Although the funeral service may be a simple Burial of the Dead without Communion, the Holy Eucharist, as the Church's principal offering of sacrifice, prayer, and praise, is the preferred form of worship. The Eucharist is a service of thanksgiving to God for his redemption of an earthly life that has come to an end. The Book of Common Prayer suggests that every effort be made to schedule the service at "a time when the congregation has opportunity to be present." At the funeral service the celebrant may be assisted by the deacon. Laypersons – including family and friends if they desire – should take part in the service by reading lessons. The priest will assist the family in choosing readings from Scripture as suggested in the Book of Common Prayer (if the deceased has not already made requests). Other readings may be

approved by the priest. Comments by friends and family members are appropriate for a memorial service or at a reception following the funeral.

Music may be offered, either by the organist alone, or by the organist and/or choir or soloists and the congregation, if there is time for such arrangements to be made. Hymns should be chosen from texts in the Bible, the Prayer Book, or the Hymnal. Hymns, psalms, and other music should express both the joy and the certainty of the Christian hope of resurrection. Easter hymns, All Saints' hymns, and general hymns of praise are all appropriate. They should be familiar to persons from diverse denominations if possible. Some examples of suitable hymns are 680 ("O God, our help in ages past"), 551 ("A mighty fortress is our God"), and 174 ("At the Lamb's high feast we sing"). All music must be approved by the priest and the organist.

The family should provide flowers for the Altar – a few arrangements might be appropriate in the Narthex, but not in the chancel or the nave. A flower arrangement may not be used on the pall, but could be used to cover the coffin (once the pall has been removed) as it leaves the church.

### RECEPTION

If the family desires, the Daughters of the King can provide either a light luncheon or coffee and dessert following the funeral service. The priest can assist making these arrangements.

### DONATIONS TO THE CHURCH

An honorarium for the organist is expected, the amount determined by the type of service and the music required or requested. Normally this is handled by the funeral home as part of the funeral expenses. Other musicians, approved by the priest, should be compensated.

An honorarium to the participating clergy will go into the Discretionary Fund, which is used to assist people in need. Other donations to St. John's are at your discretion; donations to the Building Fund, the Endowment, the Memorial Fund, or the Music Fund are always appreciated.

## FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Full Legal Name:
Maiden Name:
Legal Residence:
Phone:
Social Security Number:
Date of Birth:
Place of Birth:
If married, full name of spouse:
Date and Place of Marriage:
If widowed, full name of deceased:
Date and Place of Marriage:
Date of Death of spouse:
Name, address, and phone of siblings (if deceased, indicate and give name only):

Name, address, and phone of children (if deceased, indicate and give name only):

Name, address, and phone of other significant friends or relatives:

If you are a veteran, please indicate:

Date and place of enlistment:

Date and place of discharge:

Rank or rating:

Service number:

Organization or outfit:

Commendations received:

Religious affiliation:

Date and place of Baptism:



Name, address, and phone of person with legal right to make funeral arrangements:

Name, address, and phone of funeral director you desire:

If any pre-arrangements have been made, please indicate:

Location of Will:

If you have a cemetery plot, Columbarium, or interment space, where is it and is there a lot number or grave number?

Do you wish to be cremated?

If so, what do you wish to be done with your ashes?

Instructions concerning selection of casket, vault, or St. John's Columbarium:

Do you wish a visitation/vigil?
If so, at funeral home or church?
Casket open or closed (if at funeral home; the casket is closed if in the church)

## FUNERAL SERVICE

Church Name:
Name, phone of clergy person:
Rite 1 or 2
Burial Service Only
Burial with Eucharist
Readings, Psalms, and hymns
Do you wish flowers to be sent or donations made in your memory, and where:
Name, address, and phone of persons you would like to have as pallbearers
Any other instructions:



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The Rev. Wayne Nicholson, Rector  
The Rev. Nancy Casey Fulton, Deacon



St. John's Episcopal Church is a Parish of  
The Episcopal Diocese of Western Michigan

The Rt. Rev. Robert Gepert, Bishop

The Episcopal Church

The Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop

The Worldwide Anglican Communion

The Most Rev'd Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury